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About the Revolution - Jacques Camatte

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The various groups that have appeared since 1945 have all refused to accept the death of the old workers' movement. To do so would be to proclaim their own negation. This does not prevent them from evoking, interpreting and theorizing it under the title of the crisis of the workers' movement, usually seen as the crisis of revolutionary leadership. Only very rarely are the causes of death sought within the class itself, because one has especially to reject the statement that the proletariat is integrated and has abandoned its mission (as Trotsky already said in 1939 in *The USSR and the War*). Some people have interpreted this phenomenon by explaining that capitalism has changed in becoming state or bureaucratic capitalism, but the proletariat remains unchanged and retains the same mission – hence the plagiarization of the *Communist Manifesto* by *Socialisme ou barberie*. There is no question of protesting against the production of a manifesto nor even of having copied that of 1848, in the name of the sanctity of the classic texts, but to make clear the very limit to the proposition. One should note in this perspective the Situationist International, which appeared a few years later, operated in the same way. (By way of contrast, *Potere Operaio* and *Lotta Continua* proposed a

neo-Leninism.)

There were people[1] who understood the significance of the defeat of the proletariat in 1945 and thus deduced the inanity of the mission of the proletariat and came to reject Marx's theory. They stated (and this was theorized 1000 different ways afterwards) that the proletariat was disappearing from the highly industrialized areas and it was marginal groups that would accomplish the old proletarian project, or even that it is the peasants in revolt in the zone not strangled by capital who would reactivate the revolutionary dynamic.

Bordiga too fully understood the defeat of the proletariat and the orgiastic development of capital after 1945. That is why he wrote "We have stated many times that the manifesto is an apologia for the bourgeoisie, and today, after the Second World War, and after the reabsorption of the Russian revolution, we add that one must write another." (*Il Marxismo dei cacagli*, 1952) The development of capital on a world scale would, he thought, augment the proletariat and the crisis resulting from the extraordinary boom would again push out the proletariat in the old metropoles, Germany in particular. This country was seen as the centre for the future revolution.

The various recessions, as well as the counter-blows of the anti-colonial revolutions in no way led to the restoration of revolutionary agitation in West Europe and the USA . The passivity of the proletariat even seemed to have become permanent at the start of the 60's. The theory and practice of such groups as the German SDS, similar groups in the USA, the Zengakuren in Japan, had the objective of reawakening the revolutionary power of the proletariat through exemplary acts. They (especially elements in the SDS) perceived the importance of the defeat and thought that the workers' movement had been thrown back 100 years. They had the intuition of a new beginning, a new epoch... This is why they vanished in the insurrectional phase which culminated in Paris and Mexico in 1968, otherwise they would have later to have diluted themselves. The dissolution of the SDS in 1970 was subject to criticism, but it was only the proof of the validity of the previous activity. They had to vanish with the emersion of the new revolutionary wave. Similarly with the Maoist movement in France, which paradoxically, apart from a few small isolated groups, best expressed the spontaneous movement born of the May crisis. The catastrophic life of the maoist organizations is the best proof of what we are advancing. They stuck an ideology drawn from and trapped by the Chinese cultural revolution onto the revolutionary shocks of May and after. But each time the content showed itself to be more powerful than the

each time the content showed itself to be more powerful than the container and exploded it. The desire to stick with the masses in revolt induced them progressively to change ground (to the extent that the struggles shifted from one social group to another) and to inflate themselves with various demands, which they had originally opposed or ignored - the struggle against the unions, seen as fundamental organizations to impose capitalism's yoke, for women's liberation, for the sexual revolution etc.. In other words, their political phraseology fell and peeled off when confronted with total needs; they had to recognize that the revolution is not simply a political question, but that it concerns a total change in the mode of producing and living, the seizure of power is only a moment of the revolution and reducing everything to this moment leads purely and simply to failing to realize all the dimensions of the revolt of men, all the dimensions of the revolution.

After the shock of May, preceded by the vast movement which developed in two areas with different historical moments, China and the West, and which was followed by great struggles in Italy, the first wildcat strikes in Germany, the Kiruna strikes, the late 1970 riots in Poland, the great revolt in Ceylon in 1971, the proletariat is contained in its groups which are the debris of the old workers' movement (that group hundreds of thousands of workers, like the PCF, or some hundreds). They organize the past because this must be continued so as to inhibit any real movement of struggle, which does not prevent some of them, the PCF and PS in France, from changing their programme to match the revolutionary tide that they too feel rising.

When all these people acted to raise the proletariat from its lethargy, who demonstrated or struggled over these past years, were they merely the playthings of illusions, or have they put up a simple fight so that the revolution could better be buried later? Let us say that from now on they buried this past, that they have liquidated the illusions in a vanished world.

The proletariat suffered a grave defeat in 1945, but it could not be overcome by proposing an action compatible with the tasks of the proletariat in a given period, but which has no relation to the present situation. The defeat of 1945 signified the impossibility for the proletariat to substitute itself for and to replace capital in the slav area, and in other areas, which rose up after 1945, and to prevent capital from realizing its real domination on the social level, firstly and immediately in the West, then over the whole of the planet (to the extent that it even is the superior form which dominates the others).

We have said that capital can only achieve that by realizing the domination of the immediate being of the proletariat - productive labour.

This implies a total break with everything that was the theory and practice of the workers' movement prior to 1945 and, given that from 1923 to 1945 there was merely the repetition of what happened between 1917 and 1923, we can modify our proposition by saying that we must break with the theory and practice of the workers' movement up to 1923.

This is not, however, to propose to build a new movement starting from the ruins of various elements of the old proletarian movement. It in no way means the writing of a new manifesto, a new programme etc., nor to return to Marx by copying his attitudes and considering them to be more revolutionary. The return to something is often the flight from something else, from contemporary reality. In fact, it consists in thinking of the lapsing of certain parts of Marx's work, lapsed because they are realized.

Marx's work basically outlines three great periods of humanity with the implicit discontinuities between them: the passage from feudalism to the capitalist mode of production, the development of this mode of production and the becoming of communism. This work also concerns other moments in the history of the human species (pre-capitalist formations), but what Marx describes exhaustively is the period of the formal domination of capital. In the *Manifesto*, the *Civil War in France*, the four volumes of *Capital* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, there is Marx's revolutionary reformism, which took account of the possibilities of the society of that time. This did not prevent him from describing fully realized communism (cf. the notes on J. Mill's book and certain passages from the *Grundrisse*) and showing the essential elements of the passage to the real domination of capital, the fundamental characteristics of this period; but he was unable to do a synthetic work on this (it is no coincidence that *Capital* was unfinished). With a better reason, he did not describe the revolutionary becoming of communism when the capitalist mode of production would have achieved its real domination (and this in detail, like with the passage on the basis of formal domination).

Many answer this by saying that it is untrue to state that Marx provided all necessary indications, because, in any case, even during real domination, there will be classes and therefore parties, that therefore the revolutionary class in particular will have to constitute itself in

party etc.

We do not deny that there are invariants, but:

1. one has to establish the domain of invariance, meaning a spatio-temporal delimitation, thus the invariant-class does not occupy so large an area as the invariant population or production (invariants called *verständige Abstraktion* in his 1857 introduction).
2. the development, the becoming, takes place starting from the particular and not from the general; one must therefore study the new determinations.

At an even deeper level, we must, because of this well defined real domination, rethink Marx's theory in its essentials and rediscover certain fundamental points which have been omitted, obliterated or simply left out of account because they were not understood. This is no hermeneutics, but a constantly renewed effort to explain concretely and explicitly what we mean by communism as a theory for which the work of Marx remains the pertinent element.

This theory explains the constitution of humanity in communist communities whose ensemble formed primitive communism, their dissolution by exchange-value and its autonomization, which is possible only when the productive forces are developed to a certain level. This movement destroyed the communities and simultaneously engendered individuals and classes. It triumph was not, however, a fatality, and it was checked many times and the old communities provisionally gained the upper hand. It triumphed in the West, however, with the ancient mode of production, but was reabsorbed by the feudal mode of production. Only on the margin of feudal society could exchange-value resume a vitality and give rise to the capitalist mode of production, which could only dominate the production process when men were separated from their means of production. This separation is what Marx called the first concept of capital. Capital thus realized what money could not, the constitution of itself in a material community by taking all men's materiality, the anthropomorphosis of capital, while men are reified and capitalized. This is completed with the formation of fictitious capital resulting in the fictitious community where man is totally blocked by the mechanism of capital, a tangible-intangible being. Man is completely emptied, his creativity is pumped-out and sucked-up, and he is even rejected by the old process of production. He tends to become marginal, the pollution of capital. Capital is autonomized and surpasses its limits (a kind of surfusion of capital), but it cannot do this without men, the necessary pollution. They are the limit to capital.

Constantly increasing oppression, which is direct or indirect after the destruction of nature, will lead the proletarians of the universal class to revolt against capital. For that they can no longer draw their strength from the past or from human bases that would have been conserved in that society, because everything has been destroyed They really have to create the movement of their liberation, they cannot borrow from old schemas, the party can only be the party-*Gemeinwesen*, and it will not be able to function when it appears by appealing to the principle of centralization, or the opposite, federalism. It is highly probable that the rising of the universal class will directly create organisms which will be compatible with the communist possibility in this society, i.e. will form communities acting with a totally different practice to that of society. One cannot foresee the details of this phenomenon, but we can already perceive it as the only possibility of the struggle against the community of capital (tendency to unify various separated activities, formation of another unity of industry and agriculture, other man-woman relations) and besides, the very moment of the revolutionary explosion will determine the production of a more or less elaborated form.

The movement of exchange-value had yet further difficulties in triumphing in areas outside the West. Marx did not think that the capitalist mode of production had to develop in Russia. He thought that, on the contrary, the *obshchina*, with its particularities, could be the support for the graft of communism after the victorious revolution in the West. In any case, he did not think that the capitalist mode of production could easily triumph in the slav area, so great was the *obshchina's* vitality he said. Stolypin's reforms and the development of the capitalist mode of production in industry caused Lenin and the bolsheviks to make an error. They underestimated the vitality and capacity of the *obshchina* to resist. The *obshchina* perhaps figured less in the statistics, but it still had not been eliminated as the behaviour of the population adapted to a certain milieu. That led to an erroneous attitude on the peasantry by wishing to force the development of the capitalist mode of production (cf. the question of the Ukrainian rising and Makhno, also the many sided polemic on the subject of the bolsheviks wishing to force historical development).

The Tsar's despotism was replaced then by capital's despotism, which could only be realized at the cost of a frightening repression of the workers and peasants. A constantly renewed repression as if the tendency to communism was irremoveable.

The movement of exchange-value in Asia tended to autonomize itself several times. Classes and individuals tended to form, but in the end it

several times. Classes and individuals tended to form, but, in the end, it was only through the external intervention of the capitalist countries that capital could develop. However, it only formally dominates the society and we are living through a particularly crucial period of its passage to real domination, thanks to the help of the world capitalist community represented by US capital. Asia can only find equilibrium if the old basic and central communities are replaced by communities of capital, given that now, due to the weakness of the world revolutionary movement, we have to exclude an immediate becoming of communism.

By definition, all human history is that of the loss of its community which was more or less strictly and more or less immersed in nature (hence nature idolatory), under the action of exchange-value; the struggle against it in the form of money (general equivalent, universal money); then capital as an oppressive community poses as a necessity for man the destruction of it to found a real human *Gemeinwesen*; the human being as universal pole and the social man as individual pole, as well as their harmonious interpenetration.

Such is communism, theory of the proletariat in its classical sense, and in the sense of the universal class[2] which is already negation in the terms of class and its invariance.

We can always better situate what is lapsed in Marx's work from this point of view and simultaneously grasp all the elements which allow us to understand fundamentally the present real domination of capital, the overthrow of all the presuppositions and their replacement by those of capital, which in the achievement of its real domination engenders delinquency and madness.

Working for this synthesis is important, but it would only be a partial activity if one were not simultaneously to attempt to see how this synthesis is already underway in various manifestations of different elements, even if this is sometimes still in the groupist form.

May was the emergence of the revolution. Since then there has begun inside the universal class, still a class of capital = the assemblage of 'slaves' of capital, a struggle which will lead to a revolutionization of this class and its constitution as a party-community, the first moment of its negation. This contradictory movement is fundamentally a process of the elimination of the past; this class cannot represent itself without having eliminated the old determinations and representations. Evidently this will often happen in a comical manner, because the past is only rejected while it undergoes a parodic resurrection, of the German and Russian lefts, for example.

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It was on immediate social distinctions, created by capital, which supported the consciousness of the American (Black Panthers, Yippies), German and French revolutionary movements in May 1968, relied. The opposition between the working class and the middle class, based on the distinction between productive and unproductive labour, production and circulation, production and consumption, was taken by Marx as the basis of his vision of the socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The perspective posed this as much for the development of capitalism as for the dictatorship of the proletariat: the generalization of the condition of the productive worker. This perspective is now realized and the revolutionary potential of 1848 is finally exhausted. Production for capital is now the fact of life for the whole population. But to each particular situation in the process of capital corresponds a 'class' vision which opposes blue and white collar, manual and intellectual, black and white workers; workers and petit-bourgeois; just as the gangs of capital oppose each other.[3]

The movement in France and Germany was considered as being specifically middle class, the mere detonator of a movement which could only be that of the working class itself, it was never seen as the movement of the universal class. It did not understand the identity of the situations of each within capital and regarding it. However, the movement of 1968 was proof of the disappearance of the middle classes, as Marx saw them, and the beginning of the human struggle against capital.

The working class, category of capital, will increasingly abandon the old parties without constituting itself in new organizations, but by living its metamorphosis which will make it fit to join other components of the universal class.

Only those with nostalgia for the past can state that the May 1968 movement was a check, those who are incapable of thinking of a revolutionary process which will take several years to complete. Since May, there has been the movement of the production of revolutionaries. They began to understand the existing needs for the revolution, the representation of capital which parasitized the brains of everyone must be destroyed. That cannot be done by the Intervention of conscious groups imposing a new representation on our befuddled brains, nor is it to be realized by a single blow on D-day chosen by fate, but will break out after a long struggle which will invade every facet and all fields of life that are imposed upon us by capital. A real operative

struggle will not be delayed by delusions of a marxist/psychoanalytical/structuralist delerium, nor the opposite, if the objective conditions are always ripe and the subjective ones not, if organization is necessary and what is its best structure and its most useful place… This delerium is the dream of capital; an eternally permanent revolution, because it is never developed, always held back by a mysterious 'string': the lack of certain objective conditions, the non-statement of a certain theory.

One awaits the revolution in vain, for it is already underway. It is unnoticed by those who await it, expecting a particular sign, a 'crisis' releasing the vast insurrectional movement which would produce another essential sign, the formation of the party etc...

Actually the disequilibrium began before May 1968 and May was its externalization, so on all levels of the total life process of capital, there are also the 'misfirings' which have not yet been transformed into crises in the old sense, but which allow the proletarians to destroy their domestication. The increasing loss of our real submission to capital will allow us to confront the true question of the revolution, not that of changing life, because all life has been enslaved, domesticated, misled by the existence of classes for millenia, but the creation of human life.

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1 E.g. Prudhommeaux. Cf. *Invariance* Série II, no. 1 pp. 33-4.

2 The universal class can be organized by capital – that is its own way of negating classes, but it can, from the moment that it is ionized, migrate to the communist pole of society.

3 The leaders of the PCF are the keenest to maintain the classical proletariat in its ghetto in society. They consider it to be their private property, thus they relentlessly defend its "characteristics" and "virtues". They have reduced it to a racket they guard jealously. One needs only to see how they bark when other rackets try to encroach on their territory.

Socialisme Ou Barbarie, capitalism, France, left communism, Lotta Continua, Potere Operaio, David Brown, Unpopular Books, Invariance